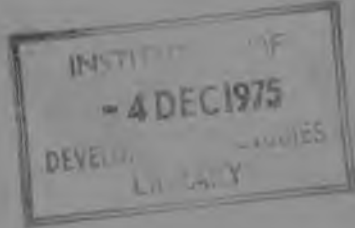




INSTITUTE OF ADULT EDUCATION
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No. 3: Exploring the Role of Literary
Clubs and Youth Movements in Ghana
Politics in the 1930s

Kwa O. Hagan

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DIRECTOR

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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF LITERARY CLUBS
AND YOUTH MOVEMENTS IN GHANA
POLITICS IN THE 1930s

KWA O. HAGAN

Any attempt to delineate political development in Ghana in the 1930s must necessarily take into account the role of literary and social clubs and other self-improvement societies, as well as the Youth Conference movement of the 1930s. Indeed, the growth and influence of these clubs and societies could be traced back exactly a hundred years from 1930. For it was in 1831 that William de Graft, a product of the School at Cape Coast Castle, founded his Study Society for Self-Improvement.¹

The small group of young men met regularly to read and discuss the Bible. Their interests soon developed far beyond Bible reading. For their regular discussions introduced them to new ideas and aspirations which led them, even in those early times, to question their lack of opportunity for a fuller life. According to W.S. Kwesi-Johnson, the veteran journalist and Cape Coast historian, William de Graft and his friends ran into trouble with the British Administration at Cape Coast. Matters got to such a head that it became necessary for the members of the study society to quit Cape Coast for a while.

William de Graft consequently went to live with relations at Dixcove, where, in 1833, he was enterprising enough to approach the skipper of a British schooner with a request for "more Bibles and a missionary". Captain Potter, the skipper, passed on de Graft's request to the Methodist Missionary Society in London. The Society was thus prompted to send out the Rev. Joseph Dunwell, who arrived at Cape Coast on December 31, 1834, to start evangelical work. Unfortunately, Dunwell died six months later and de Graft, then back at Cape Coast, with the help of others took charge of the infant church until the end of 1836, when the Methodist Missionary Society

was able to send out two more missionaries from England.² Such, then, were the roots, through the enterprise of William de Graft and his study society, of Ghana Methodism.

But we need not gallop backwards a hundred years at this moment, as our concern now is to examine the literary clubs and youth movements of the 1930s and try to portray their role, if any, in urban politics and political movements. We want, essentially, to find out what were some of the motivations which led to their formation: Who were those involved in their activities? What did they achieve? Did their activities lead to any social and political action in the community? How far did these clubs contribute to urban politics? And how far did their activities lead to a quickening of political ideas towards nationalism during the 1930s and later?

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century and up to the 1930s, young Ghanaians with some education were inspired by a desire to seek further education. These were the clerical workers of the mercantile houses of the European trade then flourishing in the coastal towns by the turn of the century. There were also the teachers and catechists of the mission schools, as well as the clerks of the colonial civil service. This educated minority were animated by ideas of mutual self-improvement and personal advancement. For their school education, which did not extend beyond the elementary level, provided for them very limited opportunities for a full life, socially and economically. Their command of English, which had become the medium of instruction at school, enabled them to come together in the towns, uninhibited by any tribal considerations. As Kimble has pointed out, these elementary school leavers "felt the need for integration with those who shared their new interests and outlook." This integration found full expression in the formation of a wide range of literary and social clubs, and other cultural associations, which flourished particularly during the first three decades of the present century. The clubs and societies helped

the young men, coming from their tribal or kinship group, to work in the urban areas and bear "the somewhat harsh, impersonal conditions of town life".³

From the 1920s the literary and social clubs and other associations increased considerably in numbers, and their members took a marked interest in public affairs. A few of such clubs were able to continue in active existence for over twenty years, such as the Literary and Social Club and the Eureka Club of Cape Coast; the Young People's Literary Club and the Cosmo Literary Club of Accra; and the Optimism Club, the Literary and Social Club and the Railway Club of Sekondi. By 1930, there were some fifty clubs and associations, mainly in the Colony but with a few in Ashanti.

These were concentrated in the large towns, where their members, as clerks of commercial houses and government offices and as school-teachers, were largely employed. Such mushroom growth was easily achieved because, as Wallerstejn has noted, "in the Gold Coast, following British tradition, organisations could come and go without the Government ever being informed or even knowing about them". There were in Accra alone some fifteen of these clubs. The other principal towns such as Keta, Cape Coast, Sekondi, Axim, Kumasi and Bekwai had their quota.

Such a significant growth must have derived from a combination of factors. First, the opening of Achimota College in 1925 had indeed re-kindled a thirst for knowledge among young workers who had missed an opportunity for formal post-elementary education. The early batch of the College staff were encouraged, some time before the College was opened, to travel widely in the country in order to know the people and study local institutions. Fraser himself and others, including Aggrey, Blumer, Ward and Dunstan, welcomed invitations from literary clubs to address public meetings in various parts of the country. Theirs was indeed an exercise in public relations, originally meant to win public confidence and support for Achimota.⁴

Their contact with the people might have led to a formation of some of these clubs. Dr. J.E.K. Aggrey, as himself a former secretary in 1897 of the City Club at Cape Coast (whose objective was "social, physical and intellectual advancement") took the opportunity, during his progress through the country in 1925-26, to exhort the youth. In his characteristic eloquence, Aggrey called upon the youth to prepare themselves through knowledge for services to the country.⁵ Another factor was that some of the Gold Coast newspapers of the period carried regular reports of activities of the well-established clubs in the principal towns, and such reports might have stimulated the formation of clubs in other places.

The literary and social clubs were on the whole well-constituted voluntary associations which operated under a constitution and bye-laws. A great many of these clubs in the large towns held regular weekly or fortnightly meetings and also organised occasional public lectures on topics relating to the public issues of the day. These lectures, given by African leaders and nationalists - lawyers and educationalists - helped to mould the minds of the educated minority and prepare them for the political and social changes which followed in the forties.

Notable examples of such public lectures took place at Cape Coast and Accra in 1937. Under the auspices of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (A.R.P.S.), Kobina Sekyi (W.E.G. Sekyi) gave a series of ten weekly lectures on the topic: "A Comparison of English and Gold Coast and Customary Laws relating to the Absolute Rights of Individuals". There is a noteworthy parallel between Sekyi's series of systematic lectures towards enlightened citizenship and the programme of university extra-mural lectures which was introduced from Oxford into the country ten years later. The purpose of the lectures was stated by Sekyi himself in his introductory remarks:

These lectures are intended to aid the ordinary member of the community to understand how the law in our day is being modified. This is knowledge that is essential to the contribution towards the cultivation of peace, order and good government that the local British Government and ... the Native Administration have a right to expect from each member of the community.⁶

Sekyi exerted great influence on the literary and social clubs for almost a quarter of a century, from 1920 onwards, towards social improvement and intellectual pursuits. He either joined or was a patron of some ten literary or cultural organisations in the country.⁷ Sekyi was very much in demand to address public meetings organised by literary and social clubs in the main towns. It was his habit to appear at these public meetings nobly attired in cloth, complete with a headgear (abotsir) to match, and shod in a pair of sandals. Sekyi's manner of dress at such public meetings was a deliberate means of popularising the Ghanaian mode of dress. But this was not enthusiastically followed by the educated elite until the 1950s, when the C.P.P. came to power and Kwame Nkrumah and his other leaders gave an aura of respectability to the wearing of cloth, especially the Kente cloth, on national occasions. Sekyi never tired of pointing out in his public lectures to the literary clubs that

By learning to think as the white man thinks we are forgetting to see things from our own point of view ... we shall completely lose our individuality.⁸

Many of the clubs at Cape Coast and Accra were able to put on a sustained course of study. In Accra, for example, the Nationalist Literary Society (Study Circle) and the Cosmo Literary Club were more concerned with a programme of intensive study for their members. Both clubs were fortunate to have Dr. J.B. Danquah as their patron. Danquah took more than a patron's interest in their affairs. He organised in the early 1930s a fee-free lecture-course in

logic and ethics for the members. Three members were thereby encouraged to embark upon further intensive studies, supplemented by correspondence courses from England, to pass the Matriculation examination of the University of London. This was in itself a signal achievement by young men with no previous secondary school education. One of these was to achieve yet higher scholastic honours by obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree in history as an external student of London University.⁹

An example of serious literary activity is perhaps what happened at the Young People's Literary Club (YPLC) at Accra during the early 1930s. On becoming the only European member of a literary club in Accra at the time, W. E. F. Ward (who had at first to cycle eight miles from Achimota to Accra for meetings, until he bought a car two years later) sat through the weekly meetings for four months without opening his mouth. He did so, as he later pointed out, to make it plain that he had joined the club as an ordinary member and not as a would-be leader. In the end the current president asked him to speak at length and give them a frank opinion of their programme of paper reading and discussion. Ward's chief criticism was that though they called themselves a literary club, not one evening was spent on the study of a literary work.

Through his efforts, the club built up a modest library. This was made possible through the club's funds from fees of a shilling a week per head. Each member of the club, some 25-30 of them, had a copy of John Ruskin's Sesame and Lilies. Each member was responsible, week by week, for opening a discussion on his particular section of the text until the whole book was worked through. Next the club members studied some of Bacon's essays, and later some Shakespeare. The members enjoyed such a systematic study of literary works and soon discovered what a powerful influence such study had had on their life and thinking generally.

Ward also impressed upon his fellow members that men could not work in isolation from women. By the time he was elected president of the club for two years running from 1936, the men had overcome their prejudices against the admission of women, and about a dozen women - mainly school-teachers, telephone operators and housewives - had become members. Part of the club's ritual was that the president-elect was led up to the chair hand in hand with two other members. Because of Ward's advocacy of female membership, the outgoing president with a grin nominated two ladies that evening to lead him to take the chair.

But Ward, soon after leaving the chair of the YPLC, fell foul of the Accra Clubs Union, a joint organisation of chairmen and secretaries that had been set up in the mid-thirties to co-ordinate the activities of the clubs and associations that had proliferated in Accra in the 1930s. Ward had published a pamphlet, entitled Africa Before the White Man Came. This was all about ancient Egypt and the medieval empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai - publications which are now commonplace, but which were then not available. The Accra Clubs Union strongly disapproved of the book, because the author had said that the Pharaohs and the people of ancient Egypt were not negro - which the Clubs Union implied meant that the negro race was incapable of any intellectual achievements, a notion that was unfortunately held by many European colonialists at the time. The author was, as a result, challenged to go down and debate the book, chapter by chapter, with the committee of the Clubs Union. This took several weeks. In the end, Ward was able to allay African suspicions about his book, which then passed as wholly well-intentioned and harmless.¹⁰

Some of the literary and social clubs, who before the 1930s were non-political but only in pursuit of educational and cultural ends, branched out into political action. For example, the Young People's Literary Club of Accra, in its study of the Gold Coast Constitution of 1925, organised a public lecture on the topic: 'The Position of Women in Relation to the Gold Coast Franchise'. At Sekondi, the

Literary and Social Club in May 1926 debated the question whether ex-King Prempeh I (then repatriated from exile) should re-occupy the Golden Stool of Ashanti. The debate ended in an overwhelming 'Yes', which was strongly re-echoed in the Gold Coast press.

Such political awareness by literary clubs was well exemplified at Cape Coast in 1927. In that year the newly-established Cape Coast Rate-Payers Association, in co-operation with the Cape Coast Literary and Social Club and the Eureka Club, as well as the Chamber of Commerce, countered the opposition of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society and succeeded in electing a young barrister, K.A. Korsah (later Sir Arku Korsah, Chief Justice of Ghana), as the first Municipal member for Cape Coast to the Legislative Council.¹¹

It is important to note here an outstanding example of how involvement in the activities of such clubs must have led directly to the quickening of political ideas in the one man who more than anyone else can be said to have hastened the process of nationalism and the eventual independence of Ghana. Kwame Nkrumah, who in the early thirties was a school-teacher in his native Nzimaland in the Western Region, has recorded in his Autobiography: "When I was not studying my spare time was devoted to forming the Nzima Literature Society which is still functioning today, and also a number of literary societies in the Axim Area. It was through this work that I met Mr. R.S. (sic) Wood, who was then secretary of the National Congress of British West Africa. This rare character first introduced me to politics".¹²

As we have observed, these literary clubs and other groups were by their functions non-political organisations. At best, they provided a forum for educated Africans to air views on political, social and economic problems of the day, without being overtly political. As Wallerstein has put it, "these associations were training grounds for leaders, both in the technical skills of running an organisation and the substantive appreciation of political ideas".¹³

We have to note that many of the people who ran the literary and social clubs in the Gold Coast had nothing but elementary education. There was, up to the middle 1940s, no adult education movement run or supported by the government, so that, apart from the public lectures, where the clubs were addressed by the professional class of lawyers and doctors, a great many of these clubs had to organise their own systematic programme of reading and discussion. All in all, then, we can see what a powerful influence the clubs exerted in their time, in promoting adult education.

The Gold Coast Youth Conference - Its Origins

The quest for knowledge and the engagement in social action by the literary and social clubs was by the beginning of the 1930s expressing itself in other directions. In a pamphlet which he published in March, 1929, entitled An Epistle to the Educated Youngmen in Akim Abuakwa, Dr. J.B. Danquah urged on the young men of his native state, and indeed of the Gold Coast, the need for town and village councils to be set up everywhere. Such councils were to take in hand the provision of sanitation and the upkeep of their own towns and villages, without having to wait for the central government to provide such amenities for them.

Danquah called for a "national assembly" of youth to consider the problems facing the educated young men and the need "to think and act together as one people for the good of the country". Later in the same year, he reiterated the need for a national assembly of youth, during the second annual meeting of the West African Student Union (WASU) Society in the Gold Coast. This was held at the Rodger Club, Accra, on 18 May, 1929, under the chairmanship of Nana Ofori Atta, the Omanhene of Akim Abuakwa, and Danquah's half brother. At that meeting Danquah spoke enthusiastically of "a new spirit of youth", and the hope of establishing in the country "a national movement of youth".¹⁴

The originators of the Gold Coast Youth Conference (GCYC) were J.C. de Graft-Johnson, then Secretary for Native Affairs at the Colonial Secretariat, Accra; K. Brakatu Ateko, of Achimota College, with Dr. Danquah as the prime mover. The three men met often during 1927-1929 in the house of de Graft-Johnson at Adabraka, Accra, for the purpose of analysing a series of articles which Danquah and Brakatu Ateko were then contributing (mostly under pen-names) in the Gold Coast press on political, social and educational problems. The animated discussions in de Graft-Johnson's house, which sometimes dragged on far into the night, led to "the idea of a conference of active youth to consider Gold Coast affairs".¹⁵

'Youngmen' or 'Youth' of the Conference Movement

It is important, before finding out what the Gold Coast Youth Conference movement was and what it achieved, to discover who were those 'educated youngmen' Danquah had in mind? Who were those to form a 'national movement' or 'national assembly' of youth? What was the new spirit of youth to which Danquah was pointing? And who constituted the class of 'Active Youth'?

As Dennis Austin has pointed out, the term 'Youngmen' (which in the twenties and thirties had become a local expression and was often spelled as one word) was used in traditional society in the Gold Coast to designate the 'Commoners'- "those who held no Stool office of importance.... The 'Youngmen' were not necessarily young, anymore than the elders who surrounded the Chief were old: the latter were councillors, usually subordinate chiefs and holders of important Stools; the former were the commoners". These young men came to be identified more and more with the educated commoners - shopkeepers, petty traders, public letter-writers, clerks, catechists, school-teachers and

artisans, and all the ranks of the educated salariat. These not infrequently "helped to focus discontent against both the chiefs and the colonial authorities".¹⁶

An example of such discontent was shown in 1915, when the young men of Kwahu, taking advantage of the traditional form of organisation open to them, founded their own Asafo, "with the object to protest and resist against the imposition of heavy fines for breach of oaths, because nothing worthy... was left as a result".¹⁷ In Cape Coast, as we have noted earlier, the young men of the literary and social clubs, in concert with other bodies, withstood the opposition of the A.R.P.S. and elected a young lawyer to the Legislative Council in 1928.

These 'youngmen', referred to in their proper role in Akan traditional society as Mmerante (in Twi) or Mbrentse (in Fante), had a decided role to play. In Ashanti, as Wallerstein has pointed out, "Youngmen's organisation (Mmerante) had a recognised and important place in the political structure". Busia has further defined the role of the youngmen: "The commoners or young men (Mmerante as they are called in Ashanti), played an important part in the election (of a chief) They had a recognised leader or spokesman, the Nkwana Kwaahene... whose position was of political importance as it enabled the commoners to criticize the chief".¹⁸ A similar political role was played among the Fanti by the Asafo, a quasi-military company, which also performed social functions of community betterment, such as 'Akwanbo' (road-clearing or road-building), construction of market-places and school-buildings. In Akan society, Mmerante or Mbrentse "served as mechanisms of political balance to protect the interests of the 'commoners' or non-privileged members of the tribe".¹⁹

The purpose of the Youth Conference movement of the 1930s seems to have been an attempt on the part of Danquah and others to knit together the many local organisations run by the educated young men into a broad national movement and so effect a partnership between the intelligentsia - the

small class of professionals and businessmen - and the other classes of educated commoners, in a move to create a 'new spirit of youth', within which it was considered possible to take a concerted action on the public issues of the times. By 'active youth' was meant all those who were of mature age and mentally alert. There was no upper age limit. The organisers and participants of the Youth Conference were in fact educated men and women in their late thirties and forties. All these constituted the class of 'Mbrentse' (the Youth) as distinct from the 'Chief and Elders'.

The Gold Coast Youth Conference was not a corporate body governed by any constitution. It was at best "only a convention or convocation, the calling together, from time to time, of different societies and clubs to discuss affairs of common interest to their members and the country".²⁰ So that, to restate it more fully, the Youth Conference was merely an assembly of the various voluntary associations brought together from all parts of the country and provided with a forum to deliberate on the social and economic well-being of the chiefs and the people of the Gold Coast. Compared with the militant attitude of Wallace Johnson's anti-colonialist organisation - the West African Youth League - and later the Committee of Youth Organisation (CYO) which blossomed into Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (C.P.P.), the Youth Conference contented itself with calling for modest reforms. Its approach was markedly constitutional, with due regard for constituted authority. It was prepared to achieve its aims of social reform through the proper agents of now formalised indigenous authority, namely, the Ashanti Confederacy Council and the Joint Provincial Council of Chiefs; it was also prepared to work with the Cape Coast-based A.R.P.S., whose influence was very much on the decline during the 1930s.

When the G.C.Y.C. came into being, there was still a rigid administrative separation between Ashanti and the Colony, which was maintained until the Burns Constitution

of 1946 under which Ashanti representation on the Legislative Council was achieved. It was therefore a significant move on the part of the Continuation (or Working) Committee of the G.C.Y.C. to have looked ahead for a new approach of economic, social, political and cultural action that would jointly involve both the chiefs and the commoners of Ashanti and the Colony. But the Committee was not enterprising enough to break through the isolation of the Northern Territories, as it was then known. This failure was inevitable, because of the considerable social and administrative differences which then separated the North from the rest of the country.

The Youth Conference of the 1930s

The first Gold Coast Youth Conference was held at Achimota College during Easter, 1930. Achimota seemed a natural venue for this first meeting. The College staff had already established contact with a great many of the leaders of the youth movement. The staff of Achimota, as we have noted, had earlier been encouraged, before the College was opened in 1925, "to travel widely and to study local institution". As a result of the facility thus provided, two members of staff laid the foundation of the serious study of African folk-lore and culture, music and history. Fraser 'the Chief' of Achimota, had himself started off on such a course by a series of educational conferences held at Achimota, the first of which was in December 1926. Through the Achimota Conferences, Fraser brought together educated African leaders to meet the staff of Achimota to "discuss selected educational topics bearing on what Achimota was doing and hoped later to do".²¹ The holding of the conference at Achimota was thus another proof of the genuine interest which the College staff had shown, and their interest in the aspirations of African thinkers and leaders of the Gold Coast.

The conference was held under the general chairmanship of John Buckman, a "land surveyor and architect", and a patron of literary and social clubs in Accra. The general secretary was a lawyer, K. Adumua-Bossman, and the theme of the conference was: 'The Essentials in the Progress and Development of the Country'. Speakers included J. E. Casely-Hayford and Nana Ofori Atta. This was a carefully-considered combination, for the former represented the professional class of the educated elite, while the latter was then the undisputed spokesman of the chiefs. It was significant that both legislators should thus address themselves to the educated 'youngmen', or commoners, of the Gold Coast.

Other speakers were Dr. F. V. Nanka-Bruce, K. A. Korsah, Kobina Sekyi, and Miss Ruby Quartey-Papafio, then headmistress of the Government Girls' School at Accra. The Kumasihene, Nana Prempeh I, and other leading Paramount Chiefs of the Colony became patrons of the G. C. Y. C. movement. The five days of "deliberations, resolutions and proceedings", from 17 to 21 April, were unfortunately not published. This failure, as recorded in one of the very few publications of the G. C. Y. C., was "partly from lack of adequate funds and principally from the regrettable fact that the general secretary of the Conference was handicapped from lack of opportunity".²²

What, then, did the first Conference achieve? The work done at Achimota that weekend - evidently within a new climate of opinion created by the first opportunity of common fellowship between the intelligentsia and the other ranks of the educated minority who assembled from parts of the country - was never permanently registered in the records of the country, except through a few summary newspaper reports. Nevertheless, the organisers claimed that the 'general effect' which the Conference created 'became marked and increasingly evident' in the public life of the country. Even so, there was no follow-up activity, and nothing was heard of the Youth Conference again until the formation of the Accra Clubs Union in 1937.

The Accra Clubs Union was a conglomeration of the several literary and social clubs in what now constitutes the Greater Accra Region. The Union's working committee comprised the chairman and secretaries of the various associations, and its task was to co-ordinate the public activities of the constituent clubs. Although much publicity was given in the local press about its formation, it appears that the Union at first had no clear-cut notion of its own functions. The Gold Coast Spectator questioned its raison d'etre, and suggested that the Union engage itself on the economic problem then facing the country, namely, the cocoa price controversy which had led to a hold-up by the Farmers Union of the sale of the season's cocoa crop. The editorial pointed out that economic disorganisation in the country might surely affect the cultural growth about which the Union was naturally most concerned. Trade, the newspaper emphasised, was the key to cultural advancement. With trade at a standstill, culture was impaired. The Gold Coast Spectator therefore called upon the Union to devote its energies to trying to solve the country's economic problem.²³ Thus was the Accra Club's Union spurred into action.

Its chairman, W. Ayiah Hanson, a pharmacist, the proprietor of two drug stores in Accra, and the founder/principal of a School of Pharmacy in Accra, got in touch with Dr. J.B. Danquah, who had in 1936 returned from Britain where he had spent a further two years on research work (mainly at the British Museum). This was after he had served as secretary to the Gold Coast and Ashanti Delegation to the Colonial Office in 1934. In consequence of Ayiah Hanson's contact with Danquah, a general meeting was convened at the Rodger Club, in December 1937, by the working committee of the Accra Clubs Union. This was attended by representatives of the various literary, social and cultural associations in Accra, Christiansborg, Labadi and Teshie. The meeting, under the chairmanship of

J.C. de Graft-Johnson, resolved to hold the second Youth Conference at Cape Coast during Easter, 1938. The Accra meeting passed some important resolutions which served as the only articles of a constitution for the Conference:

1. That the 1938 Conference, following the precedent of the 1930 Conference, should be non-political. Its main purpose is to focus the mind of Youth on the country's social and economic problems and invite suggestions for solution, and
2. That all social, literary, educational and industrial Clubs, Unions, Societies and Associations should be invited to participate in the forthcoming Conference.²⁴

The Cape Coast Conference was held against the background of the economic and political situation then prevailing in the country: A joint action taken by the Provincial Councils of Chiefs on the cocoa help-up had led to the immediate formation of the Farmers Federation of the Colony and Ashanti, under the leadership of the Asantehene and the Okyenhene (Nana Ofori Atta). The Federation sought a better price for the cocoa crop, and economic and social changes in the country. The theme of the conference, which was: 'The Problems of our Social and Economic Reconstruction', could thus not have been more topical.

The Conference was pre-occupied with bringing about economic and social reforms. It passed a number of resolutions on: A national trust fund for development; the law of marriage and the prevailing extravagance in the celebration of marriage; the law of inheritance respecting son and nephew succession; the extravagance in funeral customs involving the undue waste of money and time, and the strain on health; education expansion, health and sanitation; and the expansion of trade and commerce.²⁵ But the Conference seems to have been completely silent on such controversial themes as imperialism, colonialism, self-government and independence - issues which after 1948 gripped the attention of Kwame Nkrumah's Committee of

Youth Organisation (CYO) and led to the demand for a constitution that would give the Gold Coast nothing less than 'Full Self-Government'. The Youth Conference of the 1930s was essentially concerned with social reforms.

The Conference was conscious as to the authority of the Ashanti Confederacy Council, whose decisions had a binding effect on all the states of what was formerly the Confederate Kingdom of Ashanti. Although the influence of the Cape Coast-based A.R.P.S. as a political organisation, had considerably waned in the 1930s the Youth Conference nevertheless maintained that, by virtue of its constitution, the Society was "naturally entitled to take the initiative in the matter of the national trust fund by bringing the mind of the country to realise the national import of the fund and act accordingly". But the Youth Conference seemed to be unsure as to the support it could enlist from the Provincial Council of Chiefs, which it contended had been a creation of the colonial government, although the Conference was convinced that the Council's constitution was "so elastic that the State-members thereof are in a position to bring the nation's will to bear and translate its decisions and deliberations into action".

Accordingly, Dr. Danquah, after the Easter meeting at Cape Coast in 1938, led a delegation of the Youth Conference to the Joint Provincial Council's assembly at Swedru, to seek the Chiefs' co-operation for the resolutions of the Conference. A direct outcome of such co-operation was seen in the Conference's resolution relating to funeral customs. The Youth Conference requested that the Chiefs' Councils should invite every 'state' or traditional authority in the country to submit a statement setting out the obligations of an individual upon the death of a member of the family. Such a statement was to indicate whether certain prevailing practices such as days of fasting, memorial services, provision of drinks, provision of special black or red cloths, the use of a brass bed-

stead for the lying-in-state of the dead, and funeral donations were indeed all necessary and customary, Upon collation of such detailed information, the Chiefs' Councils were requested to bring about standardisation and regularisation of funeral customs in the country.²⁶ What this exercise achieved has been difficult to ascertain, in the absence of any documentary material.

Under the stimulus of the Continuation Committee, the Accra Clubs' Union was able to present a memorandum suggesting reforms in the marriage and funeral customs of the Ga people to the Ga State Council. This memorandum suggested drastic reductions to be made in financial obligations pertaining to marriage and funerals, and requested that these should be regularised. An Accra newspaper expressed its pleasure at the kindly attitude of the Ga State Council towards the proposals. It welcomed the co-operation that was happily developing between traditional authority and the educated elite.²⁷

We have noted attempts made by the Youth Conference to bring together the literary and cultural associations, the intelligentsia and the Chiefs of the Colony and Ashanti to embark upon common 'national' action in the country. We have also noted other joint economic and political activities during the 1930s, such as the formation of the Colony and Ashanti Cocoa Federation. The two Youth Conferences held at Achimota and Cape Coast had been attended by delegates from Ashanti, representing such organisations as the Asante Kotoko Society, the Optimism Club, Eureka Club and the Literary and Social Unity Club, all of Kumasi. The Traveling Group of Conference Representatives had established contact with the Ashanti Confederacy Council, and the Asantehene had himself in 1938 become one of the patrons of the Youth Conference. Such moves had however not been enough to establish a real presence for the Youth Conference movement in Ashanti. Hence a resolution of the second Conference at Cape Coast to hold a third one in the the Ashanti capital during the Easter of 1939.

The Kumasi Conference, held at Wesley College from 6 to 9 April, 1939, had as its theme: "Youth and Service to the Community". The Conference followed the established pattern of the earlier ones of a partnership between educated youth, the intelligentsia and traditional authority. The Conference chairman was Nana Owusu Afriyie II, the Akyempimhene. The first Ashanti lawyer, E. O. Asafu Adjaye, and J. W. K. Appiah, the secretary of the Ashanti Confederacy Council and a founder-member of the Asante Kotoko Society, both addressed the Conference. 28

The Youth Conference in the 1940s

The fourth Gold Coast Youth Conference, which did not appear to attract much public attention, was held at the Teachers' Training College, Akropong-Akwapim, during Eastertide, 1940. This was largely attended by delegates of the Accra Clubs Union. The Conference was at best merely a follow-up of the third one at Kumasi, and was concerned with finding an effective means of implementing the various resolutions of the second and third Conferences. 29

In 1941 the co-operation between the Youth Conference and the Chiefs led to the preparation of an elaborate Memorandum by the Youth Conference for changes in the administration of the Gold Coast. This in turn led to the setting up of a committee, under the chairmanship of K. A. Korsah and with Dr. J. B. Danquah as secretary, to draft the terms of a new constitution. This document was submitted to the Government, and a copy presented to Lord Hailey during the latter's fact-finding tour of West Africa in 1942, under the aegis of the Colonial Office. The draft constitution thus presented formed the basis of the Burns Constitution of 1946. 30

A significant achievement of the Gold Coast Youth Conference was the part its Executive Committee played in the foundation of higher education in Ghana. Following the Walter Elliott Commission on Higher Education in West Africa, which recommended in its Minority Report, in June

1945, that there be established only one University College for the whole of British West Africa at Ibadan, with Fourah Bay and Achimota each relegated to the status of a Territorial College, the Gold Coast Youth Conference, under the leadership of Dr. J.B. Danquah, submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of State through the Gold Coast Government protesting against such a recommendation. During the visit of Colonel Oliver Stanley, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, to the Gold Coast in 1944, in connection with West Africa's war effort, the Gold Coast Youth Conference sought an interview with him at Christiansborg Castle on the subject of higher education provision for the country.

The Youth Conference's delegation comprised Dr. J. B. Danquah, as leader, K. Brakatu Ateko, and W. Ayiah Hanson, the chairman of the Accra Clubs Union. For the best part of an hour the delegation reportedly disputed with Colonel Oliver Stanley on the ability - and indeed the preparedness - of the people of the Gold Coast to establish and maintain their own institution of higher education.³¹ Such a move by the Youth Conference, coupled with other protests by public bodies such as the Achimota Council, the Central Advisory Committee on Education, and the Joint Provincial Council of Chiefs, must eventually have influenced the Secretary of State's Dispatch, No. 169 of 6 July 1946, as a result of which the Gold Coast was able to establish its own University College in 1948.

The Continuation Committee of the Youth Conference managed in the early 1940s to focus attention on controversial issues by organising a series of public lectures and by taking social action in other ways. For example, the Youth Conference was able, through agitation, to secure the reversal of a decision by Government in 1940 to close down the Esiama Rice Mill, which had been running experimentally in the Western Province. The mill consequently had to continue in production, under the direct charge of the District Commissioner at Axim.³² Another form of social action by the

Youth Conference was expressed in 1942, in the setting up a Watch Committee to examine the areas of bribery and corruption in the country.³³

The G.C.Y.C. had, by its Easter meetings, and the publicity given by the press to its activities, established its importance by 1945 as a national movement bringing about an intellectual quickening which led to a post-war political awakening. Dr. J.B. Danquah, a co-founder and the general secretary of the youth movement, and one known to have borne personally a large share of the administrative cost of the Conference, wrote a poem in 1938 to reflect the 'new spirit of youth' which the Conference had created. Danquah charged the youth of Ghana —

Buck up, O Youth, and kill the bogey!

The bogey that your race is infant!

Know ye not that God is very busy, 34

And helps only the few who are constant?

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3. See David Kimble, A Political History of Ghana 1850-1928, p.148.
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31. Oral history by K. Brakatu Ateko.
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33. Are We to Sit Down?, publication by the Youth Conference, 1942, p.11.
34. First Steps, p.iv; see also David E. Apter, Ghana in Transition, p.128

Appendix

The Gold Coast Youth Conference
Resolutions on Social and Economic Reforms.

I National Trust Fund

1. That a national trust fund should be established for the benefit of the Gold Coast and Ashanti.
2. That the only competent authority to constitute a body to raise a National Trust Fund with power to appoint Trustees is an assembly of the National Rulers of the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti through their corporate councils working in collaboration with other political bodies in the country; and the Youth Conference should take all necessary steps to bring such a body into being through propoganda and any legitimate means at its disposal.
3. That matters for which a national trust must be provided include education and health, agriculture and industries, historical and scientific research, physical training of youth, and all other common purposes and emergencies.

II Health and Education

That in the opinion of the Conference the systems now operative for Education, Health and Sanitation are inadequate for the essential needs of the country, and that the time has arrived for efficient national systems to be evolved, and that, for this, a national fund is necessary, and should be raised as resolved by this conference.

III Trade and Commerce

That the system of trade and commerce obtaining in the country by which it's natural wealth is exploited mostly for the benefit of the foreigner at the expense of the

native is dangerous to the economic stability and permanence of the people of this country and that this conference recommends that the matter be brought to the notice and attention of the Natural Rulers with a view to their taking suitable action to equate the said unbalanced conditions by means of a national fund and other means appropriate for the purpose.

IV Marriage

1. That the prevailing extravagance in the celebration of marriage is inimical to the progress of the country, and steps should be taken to dispel from the minds of the people that erroneous idea that ostentatious display and extravagant expenditure before or during the ceremony are in any way essential for the celebration of a respectable marriage.
2. That the best way to remedy this evil, is to spread the right ideas about the true purpose and object of marriage.
3. That the time has arrived for the people of this country to encourage the native form of marriage with modifications in it's ceremonial; that necessary provision should be made to safeguard the interests of all parties concerned, and that such marriage should be made public and compulsorily registered with a native authority.

V Inheritance

1. That the self-acquired property of a person dying intestate shall be divided into three parts, two-thirds to the wife and children by marriage in accordance with native law and custom and one-third to the maternal family.
2. That where the self-acquired property of a person dying intestate consists only of one house the wife and children

and the maternal family should be entitled to live in the house in common.

3. That the law of inheritance recommended by the Youth Conference shall not at present affect the law of successions to stools.
4. That where any woman marries a man according to the above reform, the woman should be received in society as the sole wife of the man and so referred to as Awura (or Mrs.) using the husband's name.
5. That the custom which requires the wife to return all personal effects to the husband on divorce should be abolished.

VI Funeral Customs

That there is extravagance in funeral customs involving undue waste of money and time, strain on health, loss of business and hardship for some members of the bereaved family, including the widow and children, and that as this practice is indulged in generally by the public by way of custom the Natural Rulers should pass legislation to put a stop to such extravagance and hardship; and that the Youth Conference should take all necessary steps to approach the Natural Rulers on the subject with a view to their passing necessary bye-laws throughout the country to standardise expenses in funeral custom according to rank of persons and the local practice in each district or state.

VII Organisation of a system of Native Administration.

That it is not healthy for the country to place all its judicial administration in the hands of the British Courts, for the reason that judges and magistrates in these courts come for the most part straight from

British law schools or courts without adequate knowledge of native law and institutions.... We hold that... people should resort to court of their own tradition for the determination of their social and communal relations in the land, family, and business.... Africans trained in the law of their own country and to a certain extent in British law of procedure should be appointed magistrates in the native courts, some of the elders sitting with them as councillors or assessors to judge of purely native law and customs.

Sources : First Steps Towards a National Fund; and Lord Hailey, Native Administration and Political Development in British Tropical Africa, Confidential Report 1940-42, p.135.



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